

Rawlins: Okay, this is Sally Mackey. It's Wednesday, January 5, 1994, 1:45. And when I interviewed John Barlow he was pretty persistent in identifying you as the person who had gotten him involved in the Wagonwheel Information Committee. And also identified you as the person who had done the most to probably organize and motivate the effort around here. And I wonder if you could tell me how the effort started, what got you involved initially and what you did.

Mackey: Okay, well it was, I think it was in the, around 1970 that there were, because, I think of Earth Day and the publicity on that -- there were several of us who were interested in trying to see what we could do about getting a recycling program going for the town. And Doris Berzlander and Harriet Jorgensen, who's since moved away, and I proposed to the town that they appoint us as a town kind of environmental committee. And we gathered up beer cans and things like that, you know. And then there was a proposal that came out of, I think it was the adult education office of University of Wyoming. Leen Ellis was the instigator of it, talking about, the program was, "Take a Look at Your Community." And the office at the university would help you set up a program so that you could look at the various things that were affecting your community. And what they indicated the future of the community might be. And so we worked out a program with this group and set up the "Take a Look" program, and we invited all the government agencies that were in Pinedale at the time, I think the Forest Service, the Bureau of Reclam — or the BLM rather, the Soil Conservation Service, the Game and Fish. And well, let's see, we invited the county officials, the town officials. And I can't give you all the specifics on the program that we set up, but as we

were preparing this program about that time, there had been announcements about the Wagonwheel Stimulation Project clear back in the late '60s. And as you look back on it, a lot of the specifics were in the proposal but for some reason none of us caught — it didn't make much of an impression on us when the news of El Paso was first released, their proposal. And they did meet with various local officials. Well, anyway, this was, as I say about 1970, and we decided that, one of the things that came up, I'm trying to remember whether there

was an Environmental Impact Statement. I don't think, it didn't come up quite at that time, but for some reason all of a sudden the focal point was the nuclear gas stimulation, the Wagonwheel project. And the other agencies made their reports, but there, I can't tell you, I suppose there were about forty people from around the community that attended this meeting and voted to investigate further the nuclear gas stimulations proposal. And that's really where this group evolved. And there were, I'm trying to think of the time of year, whether it was in the fall. Or maybe it was in February, somewhere. That's something I'll have to look up. But anyway, the, after the group decided that that was the project that we wanted to study and investigate, then we might have elected chairmen or something. And we thought it was wonderful that some of the younger people were so interested. And, but then, not, they didn't really follow up. They were interested but didn't seem follow up on any plan of action. So it seems to me that the adults met again and we tried to form an organization that would study the program and also try to bring information to more people in the community. It was a fairly good crowd for the community, for the people that attended the regional meeting, but, but. . . .

Rawlins: You know, anything you do on the table, that mike will pick up.

Mackey: Oh! (Laughs.) Okay.

Rawlins: That will sound like you're dragging a horse across the table.

Mackey: I guess I'll quit squeaking my chair, too.

Rawlins: So ...

Mackey: So that's where the Wagonwheel Committee sort of evolved. And we came up with the name Wagonwheel Information Committee, because although we had a lot of reservations about the project and were quite alarmed when we really started studying the proposal we wanted to call it, a group that was a study group. And we actually were trying to study all aspects of it, and that's how we really got started on it.

Rawlins: What was it in particular about this project, you know, given that there's a lot of oil and gas development in this area, at that time there was a lot of natural gas drilling going on, a lot of people in the county work for El Paso, and so it's an accepted part of the community basically. But what was there about this project in particular that led you and the other citizens to get involved to this degree and to oppose it? What was really --

Mackey: It was the use of nuclear power. And the effects of that. And of course it was not only, as we looked into it more, the radiation and that type, but also the seismic effects. And then, I think it was about this time, and I'm trying to decide, because we had a, we called a meeting. Let's see, it was going to be in the gym, the Pinedale gym, and we invited county officials, and, oh, various speakers who were experts in their fields as well as local people who wanted to express their feelings. And by that time Teno had sent us an Environmental Impact Statement, and it was, I think that was the thing that really began to concern us. He might have sent one when it was published, and then I think that he, when we had the public meeting scheduled we got him to send, oh, I think maybe something like two dozen or more so that we could spread them around. But as we studied the Environmental Impact Statement, then we were aware of the possible consequences. And they sounded pretty frightening.

Rawlins: What — is there anything in particular that sticks in your mind that, oh, any kind of an image or idea or anything? You were talking about radioactivity, is there anything that sticks in your mind as concerning you particularly?

Mackey: Well, I think it, that none of us knew too much about, well, of course there were some that were more, of course, Mary Ann Steele. And, well, Ken Perry, and other scientists on the, that were in the group, explained the chain of, well, how it gets into the food chain. And if you raise cattle and the cattle get it, I mean, that it, and it becomes an accumulated thing. And then either in the beef or in the milk, it can be transferred to humans. And since this is cattle raising country and people depend on their livelihood from that,

it seemed like an awful risk to take. And also the damage that could come to not only the residences but the irrigation structures, but also the possible damage to the lakes, the geology of the area.

Rawlins: From a series of [?] man-made earthquakes?

Mackey ; Yeah. And the fact that the seismic effects were supposed to be, what, 5.7 on the Richter scale? Which is — I think it's 5.7 — that's a small earthquake. And that there were going to be five of these detonations, sequentially five bombs. And it was all experimental. Nobody knew for sure, they'd never done this sequential thing before. There had been a couple of previous blasts. But the fact, too, that the gas that came out of it would be radioactive and couldn't be used.

Rawlins: And so, and what did they, was this gas at some long time in the future supposed to be usable? Or was it just, would it be --

Mackey: I don't know whether they figured out, figured there was a way they could decontaminate it, but again my memory's vague. There was a gas buggy [?] in New Mexico, this was under the Ploughshare program, and the Rulison [?] project in Colorado where they had nuclear stimulation of gas. And I can't remember what they said of that gas buggy [?], but from Rulison [?] they had not used any of the gas that they had produced. And the argument from [?] and the EEC was they wanted to try the experiment. "Just let us go ahead with this experiment so we can see if it would work, and then we'll have the techniques if we need it in the future. We're just gonna try it once." And, of course, originally they planned on this

tremendous development. That was another concern, was that they were going to, over a period of how many years, stimulate so many wells, and that they might move, what was it, ten thousand people in the area? It was, their first proposal, or press release talked about the wonderful economic development for this area and, of course, there were local residents who were very much in favor of it. And I hope you will interview some of them, too, because you want to get their point of view on this. And consequently --

Rawlins: Who would be some of the people that you remember?

Mackey: Well, I think that Vernon Delgado was. Oh, there were some people in Big Piney. I can't tell you that.

Rawlins: I guess I could probably, you know, looking through the newspapers I could —

Mackey: Yeah, and you know, on our programs we tried to get pro and con. And it did, kind of divide the community in a way. Because there were the ones thought it would be a very, very economically beneficial to the community and that the people that were opposed to it were kind of --

Rawlins: Woolly-headed liberals?

Mackey: Yeah. Well, and no! The interesting thing is that there were some very conservative people on this. That was, I think, the strength of our committee, was that we had people of very different political beliefs. And on other issues, we might be at loggerheads. And then, but the way that the committee held together and, it really seemed, there were some really incredible people on the committee. Because they remained focused on trying to study the problem and also trying to figure out ways of publicizing it, but also trying to reach the politicians that might respond, trying to get the legislature to pass a bill that would allow for an advisory vote, I guess you'd say. It wouldn't necessarily be legally binding, but it would be under the auspices of the regular election process so that it would be considered valid. And so that the people could be heard and could express themselves. But, and, and where some of our representatives, 'course Teno was

always very easy to reach and to express our concerns to. Our two senators weren't quite that approachable, I guess you might say. But I think because of some of the people on the committee who were so persistent and, you know, didn't take "no" and didn't take "no" that we got a lot of attention that we wouldn't have gotten otherwise.

Rawlins: Now do you think that one thing that brought so many different elements of the community together on this was the, do you think it was the nuclear aspect, do you think it was the fact that it was

such a massive and, you know, project, so much, sort of at variance with what had gone on around here? What do you think, 'cause obviously looking at this statement of opposition, when you did the straw poll you had almost a thousand people opposed, about, a little less than, fewer than 300, 279 voting in favor and 105 undecided. So that, that shows that at least among the people that voted in that, there was a predominance of opinion against. And what, what do you think allowed these people of real diverse politics to come together on this? In your mind, what was the uniting factor?

Mackey: Well, I think that they felt that if it didn't destroy their way of life it would, it was at least going to change it. And the outcome would be, of such an experiment that was very uncertain, very threatening. And there was, that it just, well, it was kind of an unnecessary thing, too. And later on as we studied more things, the thing more thoroughly, we found that there was a chance of hydrofracking these formations and there were other things. But I think that, of course, it was something that the Atomic Energy Commission was very interested in because they were looking for peaceful uses of nuclear energy. And this project seemed like a, you know, I'm sure it was an intriguing idea for them and also one thing that we resented was that it was because this was a sparsely populated area and therefore just a great area to try something like this on.

Rawlins: (Laughs.) You sound a little bit like victims of

Mackey: Mm-hmm. Sure.

Rawlins: Of bureaucracy, or —

Mackey: Yeah. And the more that I read about, you know, all the experiments that the AEG did. That as a scientist I would have been fascinated to see something like this. You know, you have all the theories and then you think, "Uh-huh! Now suppose we had, instead of just one detonation going on we had five sequentially. Minutes apart or something. What would happen then?" (Laughs.)

Rawlins: You know, it seems kind of an abstract interest as opposed to a personal interest or a community interest.

Mackey: Oh, sure, sure.

Rawlins: How do you think this Wagonwheel Information Committee, obviously a number of people spent quite a bit of time with it and worked pretty hard. Do you think that it had some lasting effects or benefits for the community in this area?

Mackey: Oh, I do. I think that it showed that the people can make themselves heard. And one thing, we were fortunate at the time that this happened because there had been a lot of adverse publicity on the, particularly the Rulison project in Colorado. And I think the AEC was taking a lot of hits from that. And people were, they were, you know, were more concerned. And when I say the community was kind of unaware of the nuclear thing I'm not sure that's right either because there had been publicity on it. We probably hadn't, I'm sure we didn't begin to follow things as closely as we did after, you know, we were one of the targeted areas. But because of that opposition, it made it much easier. If we'd been the first project it would have been a lot different. But I think that things were, you know, they weren't just given carte blanche to go ahead and conduct their experiments anywhere the way they wanted to. We were fortunate in that. And then also the fact that the Environmental Protection Agency had been established and there was, the requirement for Environmental, oh, what do you call it, the report? The Environmental --

Rawlins: The Environmental Assessment Effect Statement.

Mackey: Yeah, the Environmental Assessment Statement had to be made. And if, when a community had a chance to examine that, that made a lot of difference. Because otherwise you just had to take everything on the project proposer's word.

Rawlins: Mm-hmm. Hmm. It's a, you know I hadn't thought of that. In what, you know, just in tracking the process of things that you and people in the group

actually did, and I know John Barlow says that you buttonholed him in the library.

Mackey: (Laughs.) Yeah.

Rawlins: And got him interested in it. And just as far as what you actually did in this effort, what sorts of things besides, you mentioned having meetings and study groups, what, how did you build a constituency for this and what things did you actually do?

Mackey: Well, we did encourage as many people to attend meetings and to, you know, volunteer their time. And the response was really overwhelming. And the people who, who would, for instance we arranged with the county clerk's office, this was before there were very many copying machines available. We used to get, and we had so much information to get out, that we arranged that if we could buy the paper they would let us use the copy machine. I can't remember, I think we did at other places too. But, and we used to get, but the office was a tiny little place and we used to get in the hair of the county clerks (laughs), but we had people who faithfully did the copying. And then we had a real publicity crew, Phyllis Burr was here at the time and she was working for the Roundup part of the time. And then my daughter, Susan Mackey, was, let's see, let's see, she was living in either Rawlins or I think Cheyenne. But she'd had a little bit of journalism experience and she was getting out press releases. And at the end of, I think it was 1972, the UPI chose this as the most important story of the year, and I think it came out maybe second or third on AP, or something like that. So we did get a lot of publicity. We had a committee that would clip from all the state papers what the response was, you know, at any event or any publicity that we had, and how they

were carrying it. And the ones that were negative and the ones in, that were supportive. And after the press got, you know, we started the publicity on it, then that seemed to grow by leaps and bounds. There was an article in The Wall Street Journal. You probably read Mary Ann's history of it. But the Des Moines Register, and of course, Teno made the wonderful quote that it was "like going after a fly with a howitzer." And that made headlines in, I think first maybe the Lander

paper, and then the Wyoming Journal that was, and then the Des Moines Register. Phil Fradkin from the Los Angeles Times came out and interviewed us. I received a call, I guess I was visiting my daughter in Laramie, she was living in Laramie at the time, okay, [?] Sue. [?], but from Time Magazine, you know, interviewing us on what was happening. So there was a lot of good publicity so that people knew what was going on. And then we would contact various national, nationally known scientists who had spoken on the nuclear, the effects of nuclear radiation and nuclear projects. And they spoke at a couple of the meetings that we had, the county-wide public meetings. And then we got, made resolutions for the Republican, state Republican and the state Democratic political conventions. Tried to get those passed.

Rawlins: What was the fate of those?

Mackey: Well, I think the Democrats passed them. But the, I'm not sure whether the Republicans ever got theirs passed or not. Again, I don't want to slight anybody, but my memory's not good on that. But since I was a Democrat, why I know how [?]. But we tried to, and I think we got the town of Pinedale to pass a resolution. And then we had a delegation that went to Washington, D.C., to protest this to our congressional delegation. And they also lined us up, the representatives and their staffs lined us up with various other staffs. And we met with, let's see, Ruckelshaus, I think it was Ruckelshaus, he was with the Environmental Protection Agency. And also the secretary of Agriculture, and who else? And what we did, we had a small group but fanned out and tried to cover all the bases that we could for the period that we were there. And Jim Wells that ran

the travel agency arranged for us to stay at the Army and Navy Club in Washington, D.C. And of course, Ken Parry had a Beechcraft and he flew us various places. The things that kind of evolved were great. I remember a group of us went to Jackson to be interviewed for KID, the television station. We didn't have very many television outlets in those days. And it seemed to me that ideas just kept bubbling up, and somebody, whoever had the idea if they didn't know how to implement

it, somebody else did. And it was a fascinating time.

Rawlins: So you think that one of the reasons for the success of the group was that you managed to engage a state and national constituency, get interest from representatives like Roncalio, and engaged a national press? If that hadn't happened, if you hadn't engaged a wider constituency for the issue, what do you think might have happened?

Mackey: [Whispers.] I want to talk off the record.

Rawlins: Oh. Okay. Is it done? Yeah, I'd just like to ask you about the trip to Washington. You've talked already about the people —

Mackey: Well let, before you start the trip to Washington, when we were getting our stuff ready, 'course we wanted to take as a professional-looking document as we could. And we did it all on the copy machine. We had various people writing up different aspects of that statement.

Rawlins: The statement of opposition to Project Wagonwheel?

Mackey: Yes. And we wanted it to be as matter-of-factual and without too much emotion. Well, you know, but just saying that we thought it was kind of ridiculous. And we worked very hard to compile that and there were, you know, various people were assigned various parts of it. And then the Xerox committee Xeroxed, I think we figured we'd have to have a hundred copies of it, and that was a heck of a lot of Xeroxing. And then when we got to assemble it, we brought it over to this house and we made, we did our collating. We had piles that went all the way around the dining room table, the

kitchen table, back into the bedroom and back around. And how many pages are there to that? Anyway, when we collated the whole --

Rawlins: Sixty-six, sixty-seven.

Mackey: Sixty-six, okay. And we just had an assembly line of people going around and collating. And then we wanted to figure out, this was before, you know, you had all these nice machines that would bind things and stuff. So then we went to the

drugstore and we got the plastic covers. Oh, yeah, we had to, I don't think we stapled this. We had to punch them in a punch. And then we got, we wanted to finish it up nicely so we got plastic covers and you had to punch those because this thing was so thick that they ordinarily wouldn't fit. And then we thought, well, the finishing touch will be those brass fasteners and we put those on. And then we took a suitcase, well, two suitcases full of those back to Washington. (Laughs.)

Rawlins: Well, just in case, you should have worked as a supplement to the Environmental Impact Statement or something.

Mackey: Yeah. And a lot of the stuff, it was in the winter, and I'd trudge back and forth between here and the courthouse with a sled, pulling this stuff on a sled. You'd take a box on a sled. And Mary Ann had her two little boys, Mary Ann Steele. And if I wasn't pulling a bunch of copies, then I was pulling her boys back and forth while she was doing something else. And, oh, that's right, Jim Wells let us use, I'm not sure whether he had a copy machine, but he had a good typewriter. And I'm trying to think who was working as secretary in his office at that time, and she did a lot of the final typing and so forth.

Rawlins: Now who's Jim Wells?

Mackey: Well, he used to live here. And he started the travel agency. He had a lot of other financial interests, too, but that was one of his. And he lived out where Daphne Platts lives now, Daphne and Jim.

Rawlins: So once the trip to Washington got underway, what

sort of things particularly stick in your mind about Washington? You know, not necessarily the official stuff but also things you thought were funny or —

Mackey: One of the things we thought were funny was in the Army and Navy Club. This, as I say, this was 1973, February of '73. And the women were supposed to use a separate entrance and a separate elevator to go to and from our rooms and so on. And we thought that was kind of ridiculous, and

sometimes we rode in the main elevator. And we threatened to burn our bras and all that kind of stuff. (Laughs.) Oh, some of the kind of women that the feminist movement was starting. But, what else, what else? So many things. Oh! That's right. One of the best things was that Floyd Bousman and Phil Randolph of El Paso, Floyd Bousman of the Wagonwheel Committee and Phil Randolph, were interviewed by Bill Monroe on "Meet the Press." That's one thing. I think Phyllis Burr set up the appointment, you know, got through so that it coordinated with our trip. And I didn't go down to the studio with them, but you should ask Daphne about the trip to the studio and the interview and Bill Monroe's follow-up letter. Which he was just kind of amazed at the, I can't think of the word, the audacity or something of a group like this. But I can't tell that story, but that's one of the things that was really something. Then, oh, I know, we decided that we would have a slide show. We had a hearing in front of, before the, what committee? I can't tell you which committee right now. And the president of El Paso Natural Gas was there, I don't recall his name. And Floyd Bousman, of course. And while the hearing was going on, the Congress. I was trying to think whether this was Congress. No, the Senate. Anyway, somebody was having a vote and whoever it was running the meeting had to go out and vote. And there was one time that Floyd kind of took over. And the president of El Paso got up to say something, and Floyd said, "Sit down! I'm not finished!" (Laughs.) We didn't follow all the proper protocols. And then in one of those meetings someone was saying, "And of course you're all wearing synthetic clothes which are petroleum products and you're objecting to development of a gas program." Or something. And it turned out that we were all wearing wool that day. (Laughs.)

Oh, these are all bits and snatches. This is why I wish you would get a group of us together. Because one person sparks another. I wish you would sometime on this, because one person will start to remember an incident and then somebody else can enlarge upon it. And it was a great and a glorious trip, believe me. And there was one place where after the meeting that Floyd and one of the guys from Lawrence Livermore were doing an

arm wrestle, (Laughs.) At one of the pubs afterwards.

Rawlins: Just as a, sort of a present comparison: There seems to be a difference between the way the Wagonwheel Information Committee as a group and between the way a lot of the current environmental groups are formed and sort of do their work. And would you say that the diversity of the group and the diversity of politics and diversity of livelihoods and everything was one of the things that made it so successful?

Mackey Yes, I certainly would. And I think that it's awful to see the polarization that's occurring now, say between the ranchers and the quote, environmentalists. And I think that they must learn to understand each other and work together because it's, I don't think that, you know, the environmentalists talk about the pollution and the damage that the cattle cause. And yet I don't know of any environmentalist that would like to see housing developments over all the ranch lands. And there are so many things that they agree upon but the groups now that are polarizing so that the whole country will be lost if that's the way it goes.

Rawlins: So that, from, it seems like lack of a common language, or common vocabulary, and lack of a common definition of interests sort of thing?

Mackey: I think, I think that's right. And I think that the, when you say lack of a common language and I think the terms they do apply are red flags. Or snarl words, you know [?] words and snarl words. But that when you hear that term, that indicates

"bad guy" and somebody who doesn't have any appreciation for our way of life or this or this or this. And on either side, and that's a terrible mistake. And I think that there are people who sort of promote that to promote themselves and their area of power or control or something. I think that they capitalize on that.

Rawlins: Now when you say, when you use the phrase "our way of life," how would you define that? In your mind, what does that phrase mean?

Mackey : Oh, I suppose kind of small-town and rural. And not too many people. I don't, that is interesting. I suppose our way of life the way we've always --

Rawlins: So the rural in you, and the rural quality is more important than it being Western or Eastern or Southern?

Mackey: I think so that it isn't over-developed and overpopulated. Yeah, when I say rural, it doesn't mean that people aren't aware of what's going on in the world. And I mean they're not trying to withdraw from the world. But, and that is interesting that you should ask, you know, for a definition of that because we throw that term around so easily.

Rawlins: Well, I have an identification with that, too. So when I start trying to define it, I find it sometimes kind of difficult to define. You know what I mean?

Mackey : Mm-hmm. Yeah. I suppose you can, our way of life is the doing things the way I want to do them. (Laughs.) Living the way I want to live. And that's still true.

Rawlins: Well, John Barlow said that it was you, and he named a few other names. And he said you basically got together and decided what you wanted to do in this, and then got everybody going on it.

Mackey: Yeah, I was really fascinated. Now there are some key people you ought to interview: Bernie and Toni Gosar and Doris Berzlander. And, of course, we still have the Wagonwheel Committee going. We have a board of directors and officers and we have an annual meeting just to keep a corporation intact in case there's another, we need to have

the funds. We have a small savings account. And at a time we were, did function as a sort of, oh, dear, what was it? Environmental education resource. And that was when [?] Leopold made that proposal and any student that applied for a small grant we would help. And particularly if they were doing anything on this project. And we tried to supply all the information. And we've also, the files and things that we have, we try to supply information to anyone requesting it. It

used to be that there would be students from the high school who would always do a report on this, about one a year. Sometimes from the university. But in the last few years we haven't had much of that.

Rawlins: Was, did [?] Leopold, was he very involved with this?

Mackey: Yes, he was.

Rawlins: I'll have to interview him [?].

Mackey: Mm-hmm. Yes. I do have a membership list if you'd like that, you know, with all this stuff. But there are people, and of course, Sally and Phelps Swift, and Mrs. Chrisman, John Sr.'s wife. She was in Washington, too. And they did a lot to help. And, let's see, Pat Jackson has been the treasurer for . . . and then Jim Noble and Floyd.

[End]

Perry

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I guess the first thing is, how did you get involved in the Wagonwheel Committee?

I am a geologist. And some people up here who knew that I was a geologist told me that the Wagonwheel Project was being considered by El Paso Natural Gas and they had in hand an Environmental Impact Statement. So they asked me to read the Environmental Impact Statement, and after I'd read it they asked me to attend the meeting at the library, the Sublette County Library in Pinedale, to discuss, you know, the nature of the document.

Rawlins: And who, do you remember who it was who asked you, was it Sally Mackey?

Perry: I think it was Phyllis Berg who asked me.

Rawlins: Phyllis.

Perry: Yeah. So, no, no it wasn't. No, actually I, actually I met her at that meeting. It was somebody else. So I read the impact statement and it really said some things which were kind of absurd. I don't think you would ever see them today in that sort of document. I came to the library and just discussed my own opinion, really discussed what I had seen. And in the statement, as I recall, they had items like this: that when El Paso Natural Gas did complete their wells, the gas which they produced, because it was released from tight gas formations using nuclear weapons, would be radioactive. And that in the process of flaring the gas, they mentioned as I recall in the report, that some of this radioactivity might diffuse out to the downwind side of the gas wells where it was being flared. And if my recollection is correct, they made statements, for example, to the effect that people living downwind should not

really use the milk from their cows and, you know, a few other items to that, of that nature. When I mentioned this the people were a little bit upset, and so thereafter they asked me if I would attend another meeting which would be held, as I recall, in the high school. And that meeting took place and essentially I just reiterated, you know, some of the, what I considered to be the unfavorable aspects of the Wagonwheel technology. And after that it was decided that the Wagonwheel Information Committee would be set up and the